

19. Sensegiving in multicultural contexts: the role of cultural chameleoning in the implementation of Mauritius’s light rail transit system

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INTRODUCTION

Recently, scholars have begun studying positive examples of public governance (Douglas et al., 2021). By disclosing mechanisms that create public value (Moore, 1995, 2013), insights that transcend negativity in public administration studies can be of theoretical and practical relevance. Such insights can inform diverse public sector organizations delivering public services (Compton et al., 2022). Effective stakeholder involvement throughout the service delivery chain is usually considered an important factor in achieving positive outcomes for the public (Hartley and Fletcher, 2008). However, stakeholder involvement can be challenging as interests diverge enormously (Hartley and Fletcher, 2008). Moreover, the “public” throughout public value creation cannot be considered as one single actor when, in reality, it represents many different opinions (Moore, 2014). As underlined by Calhoun (1997: 84), we operate in a “sphere of publics” in the plural sense of the word.

In postcolonial country settings, the conceptualization of the “public” is even more complex. Many of these countries are characterized by multi-ethnic societies. European and North American societies are also becoming increasingly diverse due to worldwide immigration flows (Berry and Sam, 2014). This circumstance deserves attention when introducing public projects that aim to address, for example, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), namely SDG 11 on creating sustainable cities and communities. By equally addressing all involved cultural groups, project developers are better positioned to gain acceptance from relevant stakeholders (Dines et al., 2021).

Therefore, SDGs' successful co-achievement across the globe requires a constructive handling of multicultural configurations (Kaasila-Pakanen, 2015).

Sensegiving – the influencing of people's sensemaking in uncertain situations toward a preferred outcome (Maitlis and Christianson, 2014) – has been identified as a crucial communication strategy for achieving development goals (Hong et al., 2023; Kroeger et al., 2022). However, studies on sensegiving tactics, which can be applied by public managers striving for positive public outcomes (Ohemeng and Kamga, 2020; Robert and Ola, 2021), have usually implied a culturally neutral audience. Literature on multicultural communication, nevertheless, highlights that such settings require special attention (Brett et al., 2009; Day, 2007). Understanding how sensegiving succeeds in multicultural contexts is still underdeveloped. Thus, we study sensegiving in a multicultural context in the core societal makeup of an African case study as a positive feature in handling a public project initially met with contentious views.

We address this theoretical gap by studying the applied stakeholder management process used for implementation of Mauritius's recent Metro Express Project (MEP). The MEP is a pertinent case study not only due to its success in accelerating the use of greener public transport on the island but also because of the successful sensegiving approach by Metro Express Limited's (MEL) staff members in a country where “cultural diversity is part of [its] self-image” (Ng Tseung-Wong, 2018: 176). By abductively theorizing from this case based on a combination of different qualitative data (Eisenhardt, 1989; Gioia, Corley, and Hamilton, 2013; Yin, 2017), we identify the role of *cultural chameleoning* as a crucial strategy for dealing with multiculturalism when tackling SDGs through sensegiving practices. Our study provides insights on sensegiving in multicultural contexts, which are valuable for research focusing on mechanisms that can lead to positive public outcomes (see also Barboza-Wilkes and Le, Chapter 20 in this volume for a discussion of cultural competency in public service design and delivery).

THEORIZING SENSEGIVING AS A POLICY TOOL

Sensegiving is “the process of attempting to influence the sensemaking and meaning construction of others toward a preferred redefinition of organizational reality” (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991: 442). Leaders (Corley and Gioia, 2004), managers (Rouleau, 2005), and other organizational stakeholders (Maitlis and Lawrence, 2007) strive to influence outcomes during moments of uncertainty by shaping involved actors' thoughts about a situation of concern. Sensegiving is a communicative process that involves storytelling (Humphreys et al., 2012), sharing a vision (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991), or visualizing (Höllerer et al., 2018). A one-way style of communication does not

characterize it. Instead, it carefully addresses the receivers' values (Bartunek et al., 1999) and language (Fiss and Zajac, 2006).

Sensegiving is crucial as it can influence an organization's strategy (McNulty and Pettigrew, 1999). Furthermore, sensegiving moderates the success of explaining a new idea to other actors (Hill and Levenhagen, 1995) or raising news media attention about a specific topic (Petkova et al., 2013). Sensegiving is essential for shaping organizational change processes (Balogun, 2003). It is helpful when aiming to introduce positive social change, that is, by institutionalizing corporate social initiatives (Sharma and Good, 2013). Additionally, when tackling grand challenges such as climate change or gender inequality, sensegiving is discussed as a crucial influencing factor (Kroeger et al., 2022).

Overall, sensegiving can be an important tool for public sector managers, aiming for positive outcomes within and beyond their organizations. Scholars studied how public managers referred to sensegiving when introducing a new management philosophy, characterized by flatter hierarchies in the Swedish police (Robert and Ola, 2021) and new performance management institutions in Ghana's public service (Ohemeng and Kamga, 2020). Public managers' sensegiving was identified to guide employees during experienced ambiguities, leading to higher job satisfaction (Backhaus et al., 2022); e.g., during the COVID-19 pandemic, as university leaders' sensegiving has shown (Yeomans and Bowman, 2021). When interacting with involved stakeholders, sensegiving is a relevant process (Krogstrup and Brix, 2019). In the permit-application process of wind farms in Norway, sensegiving was seen as an essential moderator (Corvellec and Risberg, 2007).

Due to the relevance of sensegiving tactics, several scholars studied the factors contributing to its success. As a communicative process, scholars underlined how metaphors and mental models are relevant for making sensegiving work (Hill and Levenhagen, 1995). Another study shows that successful sensegiving actors depend on legitimate power within an organization and a good understanding of its environment (Kraft et al., 2015). Strategies of justification, translation, or disciplining have been detected as mechanisms for good sensegiving (Rouleau, 2005). Others discuss the need for emotional arousal (Vuori and Virtaharju, 2012) and emotion work (Heaphy, 2017) to make sensegiving effective. Finally, dialogical dynamics that imply an ongoing dialogue between sensegiving change agents and affected sensemakers are seen as essential (Monin et al., 2013).

As rich as this literature on success factors for sensegiving is, most of these studies imply a cultural-neutral audience of sensemakers as their cultural background is not considered in particularity. However, when referring to literature on multicultural communication, it is evident that such contexts require additional strategies (Brett et al., 2009; Day, 2007). Multicultural con-

texts need special attention as stereotyping, cultural relativism, or experiences of cultural shocks might challenge mutual understanding (Hussain, 2019). Conflicts in multicultural contexts are more existent due to misunderstanding and mistrust among members of different cultural backgrounds (Appelbaum et al., 1998). Not surprisingly, recent studies show that cross-cultural differences can negatively affect the achievement of sensegiving (Bajaj et al., 2021; Hong et al., 2016).

Acknowledging the relevance of sensegiving for public organizations to advance positive outcomes and understanding that multicultural contexts merit special consideration, further research on this overlap is needed. Such insights are particularly important for public organizations when striving for positive change as they are increasingly confronted with a public of diverse backgrounds. Cities in Europe or Northern America are increasingly defined as multicultural places due to immigration movements (Qadeer, 2016; Wilson, 2011). African countries are characterized by a multicultural society resulting from former colonial practices of settling people and drawing partially arbitrary national borders (Englebert et al., 2002). Therefore, we raise the following research question: *How can sensegiving in multicultural contexts succeed during change processes aiming for positive public outcomes?*

CASE: SENSEGIVING IN THE MAURITIAN CONTEXT

To address this gap, we adopt a single case study approach suggested by Eisenhardt (1989) and Yin (2017). By following Eisenhardt (1989), we choose an extreme case as it provides good opportunities to exploratively establish new theories by controlling extraneous variations while allowing the focus of attention on the variation of interest (Eisenhardt in Gehman et al., 2018: 288). They are extreme in showing an outcome of interest contrary to existing theoretical expectations (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007). Extreme cases highlight influential mechanisms that would otherwise be obscure, which is why their insights are particularly valuable when researching grand challenges (Eisenhardt et al., 2016). Our theory-building approach, therefore, follows along the principles of theoretical generalization (from case analysis into theory) and not along external generalization (from a sample into the population) (Eisenhardt, 1989; Gioia, Corley, and Hamilton, 2013; Yin, 2017).

We study the stakeholder management process during Mauritius's Metro Express Light Rail Transit (LRT) implementation. The MEP is a milestone in the Mauritian history of public transport as most of the population used to commute either by car, motorcycle, or bus (Enoch, 2003; Burrin, 2019; Mahadew et al., 2022). While commuting from the suburbs to the capital previously took more than an hour during rush hour, the same distance can now be travelled within 30 minutes. After a six-year-long planning phase

(between 2011 and 2017) and a five-year-long construction phase for the first and second part of the project (between 2017 and 2022), the MEP is considered a new pride of the island by addressing the “traffic burden, traffic safety and [encouraging the] use of public transport” (Thondoo et al., 2021).

The MEL, a registered company owned by the Government of Mauritius, was the primary entity responsible for implementing the project. Besides engineering and technical support, their task required stakeholder collaboration as multiple actors were involved during the entire planning and construction process. Stakeholders such as other public administration divisions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), residents, and shop owners participated throughout the development stages to share their views about the urban transport project.

The stakeholder management process of MEP’s implementation is an excellent example of studying sensegiving in a multicultural context. Throughout the development phases, MEL and its employees had to apply sensegiving practices as this public transport was new to the citizens and other stakeholders. Particularly during land acquisitions, which were required to build the train lines, MEL had to ensure that the project made sense for the stakeholders to convince them to hand over the land. The same principle applied when redefining traffic routes, creating new bus stations, relocating businesses, and so on. This sensegiving occurred in a multicultural context as Mauritius is a nation with citizens of diverse backgrounds. Before its colonization, the island had no indigenous inhabitants. “In fact, everyone who lives in Mauritius has originally come from somewhere else, whether through slavery, indenture, trade, or as French settlers” (Aumeerally, 2005: 307). The Mauritian population consists today of five main ethnic groups: Hindu-Indo-Mauritians, Muslim-Indo-Mauritians, Sino-Mauritians, Afro-Mauritians, and Franco-Mauritians.¹

Besides the challenges of facing a multicultural context, MEL’s stakeholder management approach can be understood as a successful sensegiving example; however, not from the beginning but throughout time. This becomes evident when screening the media coverage of the MEP before and during the construction phase. As Mauritius is considered a democratic country, and has a free press,² the media coverage about the MEP is a good indicator to understand whether the applied sensegiving approach can be seen as successful. It exposes whether Mauritian citizens could make sense of the new transport project and approve it or whether affected stakeholders raised their discontent.

The media analysis reveals that during the MEP’s initial stage, its conceptualization was initially met with pessimism. In 2017, the United Bus Service Employees Union (UBSEU) threatened to strike unless the government guaranteed that the new mode of transportation would not result in redundancies in the bus transport system (Putchay, 2017). The project’s construction costs, its

impact on existing infrastructures or lack of them, and the relocation of inhabitants affected by the rail's construction path were raised (Elix, 2017; *Financial Times*, 2017). Two major conflicts were reported in September 2017 during the early construction phase (Fakun and Jaddoo, 2017; *L'Express*, 2017). As encroaching houses on state land had to be demolished, affected inhabitants were unwilling to leave their settlements despite the government's pledges of compensation (Mahadew, 2020). One main reason for the emergence of this conflict was miscommunication (Fakun and Jaddoo, 2017). After this challenging start, similar reports did not occur later. Some minor protests were reported in early 2018 when several ancient trees were cut down (Antoine, 2018). In the meantime, more articles referred to MEL's exchanges with other stakeholders (Elix, 2019). Since 2020, more media articles have referred to the positive aspects of the MEP and underlined the Metro Express as a fast, clean, and environmentally friendly mode of transport (Defimedia, 2021).

According to the media screening, the Mauritian community steadily started to approve the MEP while concerns were decreasing. A journalist who followed the implementation closely agreed with this identified improvement in public perception. The journalist also confirmed that early conflicts can be traced back to a lack of communication by the officials at a time when MEL staff members were not yet involved. At a later stage, more stakeholder involvement could be observed. Hence, it seems that the MEL's stakeholder management process during the implementation phase proved important in altering the project's acceptance. Understanding this process helps to generate new insights into how prosperous sensegiving was conducted in a multicultural context.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

To explore the MEL's applied stakeholder management process during the implementation phase, we collected various data to triangulate the primary collected sources. First, we conducted four group interviews with MEL employees involved in the stakeholder management process. Besides the CEO, we interviewed engineers, place managers, and communication personnel. Per group, we interviewed two to five staff members. Interviews, held via a videotelephone platform, were conducted in English, and lasted between one and two hours. We asked questions about their applied stakeholder management approach during the implementation phase and focused on how MEL staff members dealt with a multicultural society throughout the process. All interviews were transcribed to be used for further analysis at a later stage of the study.

Furthermore, we studied MEL's social media platforms, which documented the applied stakeholder management approach in detail. In addition, we under-

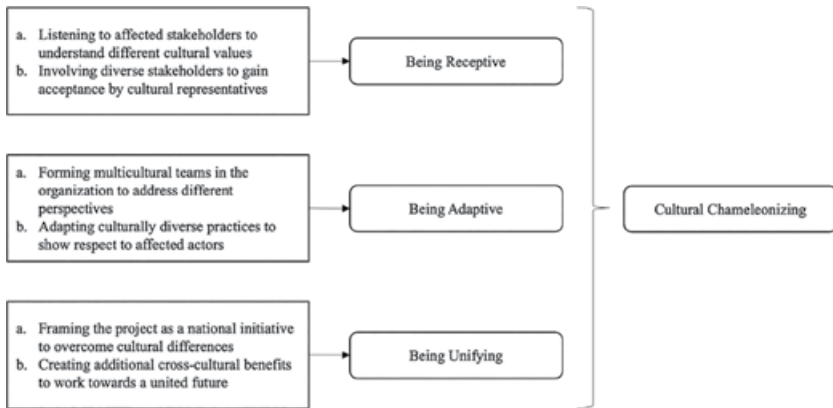
Table 19.1 Data table

Type of Data	Number gathered
Group interviews (1–2 hours) with 1–2 MEL staff members who were involved in the stakeholder management process during MEP's implementation (CEO, engineers, place managers, communication responsible)	4
Social media posts (LinkedIn & Facebook)	10
A three-hour field visit along the train line, in which two MEL staff members explained stakeholder management incidents and defined solutions per location	1
Interviews with external actors who were involved in or following MEP's implementation (minister, civil servant of a public administration department, journalist)	3
Existing literature on the implementation of MEP (<i>Le train renaît de ses cendres au pays du dodo</i> ; Burrin, 2019)	1

Source: Author.

took a field visit along the constructed train line with two MEL officials. At different locations, the officials explained in depth the negotiations conducted with stakeholders impacted by the project and the proposed solutions per case. Moreover, we interviewed a journalist who closely followed MEP's implementation and talked to two additional personnel from another public administration entity involved in the project. They contributed an external perspective. Finally, we referred to the existing literature on establishing the Metro Express, particularly the published book *Le train renaît de ses cendres au pays du dodo*, which describes the implementation closely (Burrin, 2019). Table 19.1 offers an overview of the collected data.

To analyze the collected data for theorization, we proceeded along several steps as proposed by Jarzabkowski and colleagues (2014), Ketokivi and Mantere (2010) as well as by Eisenhardt (1989), and Miles and Huberman (1994). We coded collected data into first- and second-order codes (Gioia, Corley, and Hamilton, 2013; Yin, 1994) while abductively comparing our findings with insights from sensegiving and multicultural communication research. We thus identified a core strategy for conducting sensegiving in multicultural contexts that we define as *cultural chameleoning*, which consists of three components: (i) *being receptive*, (ii) *being adaptive*, and (iii) *being unifying* (see Figure 19.1)³. Hereafter, we discuss this strategy to establish a theoretical model on sensegiving in multicultural contexts.



Source: Author.

Figure 19.1 Components of cultural chameleonizing

FINDINGS: CULTURAL CHAMELEONIZING FOR SUCCESSFUL SENSEGIVING

The data analysis reveals the importance of cultural chameleonizing during sensegiving in multicultural contexts. We use and further explain with data exemplars the term chameleonizing as a comparison to a chameleon that responds to different color backgrounds. First, the MEL employees had to understand and accommodate the different cultural sensitivities at stake initially – hence, they proved themselves to be receptive. Second, they addressed these different cultural sensitivities accordingly – thus, they were adaptive. Finally, they formulated a coherent project appealing to all involved actors – thus, they reflected being unifying.

Being Receptive

As a central component of cultural chameleonizing, we identified the principle of being receptive. This means that sensegiving actors in a multicultural environment should *listen to affected stakeholders* to receive their different perspectives. This is important since sensegiving actors are unable to know all relevant cultural sensitivities during a major change process due to cultural differences. Simultaneously, sensegiving actors should *involve a variety of diverse stakeholders*. By doing so, they can gain acceptance from cultural representatives such as priests or relevant community members and understand

better the cultural sensitivities at stake. Sensegiving actors then better understand potential cultural hurdles that might hamper a project's implementation.

In the case of MEP's implementation, MEL employees created several opportunities for citizens to directly raise their concerns so they could better understand the reactions of residents and businesses. The officials organized hall meetings in municipalities. They engaged with relevant actors whom they deemed important representatives of key societal groups. Additionally, they walked along the route where the railways were supposed to be built. This allowed neighbors, shop owners, and other actors to directly interact with them and voice their complaints, concerns, or questions. As the CEO of MEL said:

Anytime we go and talk to the various target audience, we cannot be limited to just, for example, just go on TV or we just go to Metro News. We do Metro News and explain spontaneously what we are doing in terms of various progress of the project. But we also go whenever we have something difficult to talk about and go door to door so we can talk to the people.

Being receptive thus allowed the MEL officials to understand the characteristics of the encountered multiculturalism better and, upon this understanding, react accordingly.

Being Adaptive

A second component of cultural chameleonizing is being adaptive. Once sensegiving actors in multicultural contexts better understand the cultural sensitivities, they should try to address these particularities as well as possible. To do so, they can *form multicultural teams in their respective organizations*. Such an approach is helpful because an organization with members of different cultural backgrounds is more flexible in providing customized engagement approaches to a particular cultural community. Furthermore, sensegiving actors should be open-minded about *adapting to culturally diverse practices*, for example, by participating and responding to cultural rituals that could intervene in a change process. It shows respect toward affected stakeholders, whereby the sensegivers-sensemakers relationship can be improved, supporting sensegiving.

In the case of the MEP's implementation, MEL employees have shown such an adaptive approach in several circumstances. They did so as they were unaware of all the different cultural practices in their country. That is, before demolishing a house, they ensured that house owners had enough time to organize a ritual ceremony delivered by a priest for whom they asked. In other situations, they even participated in cultural practices desired by involved actors. For example, as one construction site required to fell a tree, the officials

welcomed without hesitation the idea and invitation to participate in a ceremonial ritual:

In one case, we had to move a tree. Yeah, I remember. We could not take them on board unless we accepted what they thought would be the proper way of taking over their land. So, we let them express themselves. And we learn from them. [...]. And then they brought a priest. They brought a priest to do a prayer before we actually could cut it.

Being adaptive supported the MEL officials in accommodating the requirements of a local cultural practice with a positive attitude that eventually facilitated the implementation of the metro line.

Being Unifying

As a third component of cultural chameleonizing, we recognized the communicative approach of being unifying. Sensegiving actors in multicultural contexts should find ways to formulate the project to appeal to different cultural communities (i.e., by *framing it as a national project*). This approach can be helpful as it steers affected stakeholders' focus away from potential cultural differences and focuses on a joint initiative. Sensegiving actors in such circumstances should likewise *ensure that a planned project involving change provides cross-cultural benefits* (i.e., by highlighting potential economic, social, and ecological advantages). It allows different cultural communities to recognize how the foreseen project can be mutually beneficial.

In the context of the MEP's implementation process, the staff members operated in an environment that favored multicultural stakeholders to feel equal. The officials framed the Metro Express as a national Mauritian project to project this sense of unity in an environment of equals. They did so by ensuring several benefits beyond the pure implementation of a train line, such as establishing a connected recreational park, adding parking locations, and other minor to bigger side projects. Accordingly, they continuously emphasized that the Metro Express is not only a transport project but a socioeconomic project, strengthening the national economy:

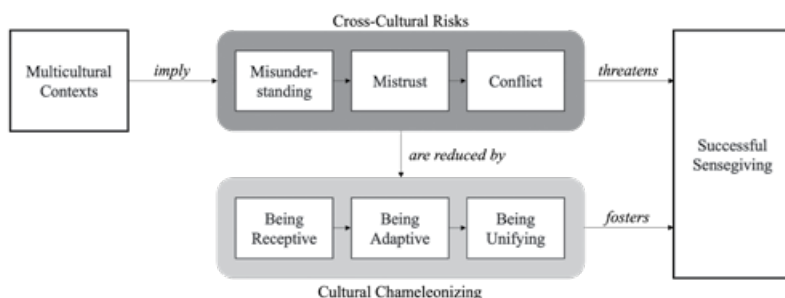
“So, when we go to those meetings, we tell the people you are here, you're working for the country. This project is a national project. We are defining a solution for the country!”

Being unifying was another way of acknowledging the diverse cultural identities involved in creating and implementing the project without favoring one group over another. Hence, by studying the MEP's implementation, we learned that cultural chameleonizing neither intends to favor any cultural group

nor strives to develop a “monocultural national ideal” (Ng Tseung-Wong and Verkuyten, 2015: 684). Instead, multiculturalism is employed discursively as a neutral force in rallying everyone behind the new project, irrespective of their cultural belonging. While some groups can use multiculturalism to gain higher societal status, others can perceive it as threatening a majority group’s identity (Devos and Banaji, 2005; Verkuyten and Martinovic, 2014). In the MEP’s case, we see that cultural chameleonizing does not disregard the multicultural flavors inherent in Mauritius’s society. Instead, it acknowledges a sense of operating among equals to unify a culturally diverse society in a national project.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this study, we wanted to discover *how sensegiving in multicultural contexts can succeed during change processes aiming for positive public outcomes*. By studying MEL employees’ stakeholder management process during the implementation of Mauritius’s Metro Express line, which required sensegiving practices in a multicultural country, we gained fresh insights regarding this question. Notably, we identified the role of *cultural chameleonizing* as a relevant moderator throughout this process as Figure 19.2 shows.



Source: Author.

Figure 19.2 Successful sensegiving in multicultural contexts

Literature on multicultural communication and multicultural teams reflects the importance of paying attention to cross-cultural contexts (Brett et al., 2009; Day, 2007). Individuals with different cultural backgrounds differ due to unequal working styles, varying expectations, and a lack of knowledge regarding other cultures (Sogancilar and Ors, 2018). Multicultural societies risk facing conflicts among cultural groups due to mutual misunderstanding and mistrust (Appelbaum et al., 1998). Such circumstances can threaten suc-

successful applications of sensegiving (Bajaj et al., 2021; Hong et al., 2016), that is, during change processes toward positive public outcomes.

Our study identified that cultural chameleonizing through sensegiving can reduce cross-cultural risks during change processes by *being receptive*, *being adaptive*, and *being unifying*. By being receptive, sensegiving actors actively involve and listen to affected stakeholders. This is relevant as it can reduce the risk of potential misunderstandings. By engaging with culturally different stakeholders, sensegiving actors can better understand their perspectives and cultural sensitivities, which might influence a foreseen change process. By being adaptive, sensegiving actors try to be flexible in addressing cultural sensitivities by forming multicultural teams and adapting to culturally diverse practices. This shows respect toward the culturally different stakeholders, whereby the risk of mistrust can be diminished. Finally, sensegiving actors try to frame a foreseen change initiative as a national project by being unifying and aiming for cross-cultural benefits. This is useful as it can reduce the risks of cross-cultural conflicts if stakeholders recognize positive outcomes, irrespective of one's cultural background.

In our study's context, namely during the implementation phase, we identified the moderating effect of cultural chameleonizing. During the early stage, the MEL employees did not invest as much time engaging with the affected stakeholders, as they admitted. "At the beginning, we were very much in a rush and could not carefully communicate with the people as we did later" (staff member of MEL). Hence, a major conflict in line with the demolition of encroaching houses evolved. Miscommunication was mentioned by the affected community (Fakun and Jaddoo, 2017b), indicating that sensegiving was not sufficiently effective then. Such major conflicts could not be reported in later phases of MEP's implementation because the data analysis revealed that the project implementers took time to engage with affected stakeholders.

While our study provides insights into the moderating role of cultural chameleonizing on successful sensegiving in multicultural contexts, our theoretical model based on a single case study holds three limitations. First, the model was established based on a country context with a relatively harmonious multicultural tradition. Although such a multicultural balance needs to be steadily cared for, as negative examples from the past have shown (Eriksen, 2004), such change processes might be more challenging in country contexts with less harmonious histories. Where indigenous groups may generally feel more distrust toward state interventions due to darker colonial pasts, sensegiving practices probably require additional efforts (i.e., reconciliation practices might be additionally needed). A second limitation is time. The focus of our study was understanding success factors for sensegiving in the moment of MEP's implementation. However, affected sensemakers' opinions can change over time, primarily as major change projects such as establishing a train line

can raise new issues, requiring new sensegiving practices. A third limitation is our narrow focus of inquiry on MEL staff's sensegiving. From this focus, it cannot be generalized that all aspects of the MEP can be understood as positive. Certain controversies related to the MEP continue, such as its financing, immigrant workers' conditions, or uncertainties about diverse impact assessments' results. As these topics were not part of this study, we cannot make any judgment on these aspects of the MEP.

Our insights contribute to two literature streams: research about sensegiving and studies on positive public administration. While sensegiving scholars already identify several success factors crucial to making sensegiving work (Kraft et al., 2015; Rouleau, 2005), such studies usually imply a culturally neutral audience. We have not been aware of any research examining how sensegiving can succeed in multicultural contexts. By identifying the role of cultural chameleonizing, we discuss how this strategy can work as a mediator to ensure the effectiveness of sensegiving when dealing with actors of diverse cultural backgrounds. We understand cultural chameleonizing as an additional component of successful sensegiving, required in multicultural contexts.

Our study can inform the current debate on positive public administration, which stresses focusing on factors that can create positive public outcomes (Douglas et al., 2021). As public managers can apply sensegiving to achieve positive outcomes (Krogstrup and Brix, 2019; Robert and Ola, 2021), the identified moderator of cultural chameleonizing can be a crucial factor in achieving such goals. Although these established insights have been developed from an African context, they can also be relevant beyond this geographic area. Many European and North American cities and regions are now multicultural in their societal setup (Qadeer, 2016; Wilson, 2011). Accordingly, public sector organizations in these regions are increasingly dependent on multicultural sensitivity during stakeholder processes. Public managers can profit from our established insights, not by unquestioningly adopting the elaborated mechanisms but by learning from the experiences of others and listening to them (McDonald III et al., 2022; Fohim et al. 2023).

Our study ventured into the complex domain of sensegiving in multicultural contexts, shedding light on the intricate dynamics that come into play when public organizations embark on major change initiatives. Drawing on the case of the MEP's implementation in Mauritius, a multi-ethnic society, we introduce the concept of cultural chameleonizing as a strategic approach to sensegiving. Through its three components – being receptive, being adaptive, and being unifying – cultural chameleonizing serves as a framework for navigating the socio-cultural complexities in multicultural settings. By applying the principles of cultural chameleonizing, the MEL navigated the cultural terrain effectively and built a project that resonated with the broader multicultural Mauritian society. These insights enrich domains of sensegiving and

positive public administration. They guide those at the helm of public projects through the intricacies of cultural diversity, turning potential challenges into avenues for societal unity and project success. Cultural chameleonizing goes beyond merely being a managerial strategy; it is a clarion call for empathy, adaptability, and unity in our diversifying world, positioning it as an indispensable skill for the twenty-first-century public servant.

NOTES

1. For defining the communities, we refer to the Mauritian constitution – Schedule I, Paragraph 3 (4) – that defines the population as including a Hindu community, Muslim community, a Sino-Mauritian community, and the General Population. According to Statistics Mauritius (2020), General Population are people of European and African origins.
2. According to the Economist Democracy Index (2023), Mauritius ranked in 2022 as the 21st most democratic country across the globe and is considered as a full democracy, ranking higher than countries such as France (22nd), South Korea (24th), and the United States of America (30th).
3. Tables with related data exemplars can be accessed via this link: https://www.c4sp.org/publications_sensegiving.html.

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